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Winchester community gathers to celebrate the life of Mike Aliano

AAYUSHI DATTA | CORRESPONDENT

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Mike Aliano and his family at a ski lodge. The well-known Lincoln School crossing guard was celebrated by the Winchester community on Sept. 28. COURTESY PHOTO/ALIANO FAMILY

Mike Aliano was a familiar sight outside the Lincoln Elementary
more than a decade, guiding children safely across the street. On

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afternoon, the Winchester community gathered at the Sons of Italy hall for a celebration of his life, hosted by his family.

Aliano died in June at age 47.

The room filled quickly with dozens of guests, who headed toward a table draped in a black-and-gold Steelers tablecloth, since it was his favorite football team. A collage of photographs reflected the many sides of Aliano's life, including pictures with his sons, other family members and his pet snakes, Maxwell and Fluffy. Candles flickered beside the images, while copies of his poetry that he used to post on social media under the name "blackwaterpoet" were laid out for guests.

"We're doing this for us, but 80% of the drive is for the Winchester community that loves Michael," said Steven Aliano, Mike's brother.

Guests share memories and children play during the celebration of life for Mike Aliano on Sunday in Winchester. A display table with a photo collage in the back to pay tribute to the many sides of Aliano's life. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/AAYUSHI DATTA

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Calvin Lee, father of a Lincoln third grader, set up a GoFundMe i
15-year-old son, Michael Jr. As of Tuesday, the page has raised $15,311 of its

$16,000 goal.

Aliano engaged with kids by calling the girls “ladies” and the boys “gentlemen.” He was remembered by students even after they had graduated from school.

Aliano was part of the Lincoln school community for 11 years, though he lived in neighboring Woburn.

“We wanted [the celebration] here in Winchester,” said Kristen Wisdom, Steven Aliano’s fiancée, who helped organize the event. “Mike loved being a crossing guard for over a decade.”

Wisdom said the family worked for more than a month and a half to plan the Sept. 28 celebration. Round tables filled the room, each centerpiece arranged with symbols of his life: a toy school bus, a stop sign decoration, a small pumpkin, a flickering candle, a can of Diet Coke, and a pair of fake snakes in homage to Maxwell and Fluffy. There was a kids’ corner with coloring pages, stickers, crayons and toys.

“Mike loved kids, so he would like all the activities that we put out for them,” Wisdom said.

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The photo table was surrounded by people, each table recalling a different story about Aliano. Children played nearby, their laughter echoing under the chandeliers, while others sat at tables enjoying trays of sandwiches and snacks provided by Stop & Shop.

“I’m surprised by the turnout,” Wisdom said. “If you go to each or tables, everyone’s [telling] a new story about him. So it’s great. We appreciative of people coming here.”

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For Martha Michalski, who met Aliano more than 20 years ago while working together at the Winchester Stop & Shop, the gathering reflected his personality.

“This is great. Lincoln did a good job as far as getting the word out there,” she said, glancing around the room. “It’s nice that they’re doing something.”

Michalski remembered Aliano as a fun person to be around, approachable, well-read and knowledgeable, but never boastful. She recalled enjoying simple moments with him, like shopping trips or watching TV together, during the years when Aliano lived with her family while dating her daughter.

“He was very likable, very approachable, you know, good sense of humor,” Michalski said.

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A table centerpiece at the Sons of Italy hall in Winchester reflects Mike Aliano's life, with a toy school bus, stop sign, Diet Coke can, and other items, during his celebration of life on Sunday, Sept. 28. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/AAYUSHI DATTA

Aliano left a lasting impression on the people of Winchester, as reflected in the stories shared during the celebration. Parents and community members remembered his daily presence at the crosswalk.

"He was always cheerful and knew how to connect with each child crossing on the street in a unique way," said Minal Rahimtoola, a Winchester resident for the last three years.

By the end of the afternoon, with kids still playing and adults lingering over food and conversation, the event felt like something Aliano himself might have enjoyed.

"Everybody who knew Mike knew Mike," Wisdom said. "He was a ball full of energy, loud, but the biggest heart out of any person. The talk and the different stories, which it seems like everyone's doing, is what he would want."

Aliano's family expressed gratitude to the Winchester community and School Department for their support through the GoFundMe and the celebration of his life.

"We're thankful for the community, the families, and everyone who helped out and reached out, and we're grateful," Steven Aliano said.

Aayushi Datta is a journalism student at Boston University. This story is part of a partnership between the Winchester News and the Boston University Department of Journalism.

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